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ABSTRACT

Parenting and growing up are both becoming increasingly difficult. Today's teenagers are faced with pressures new to this era, such as AIDS and easy drug availability. Other consequences of our technical, fast-changing society are manifested in increasing competition, conformity, and divorce. Characteristics of a normal, well-adjusted adolescent include the ability to care for others, handle stress, think logically, and enjoy life; a desire to succeed; and a general feeling of good physical health. Behaviors to watch out for include dramatic mood swings, self-isolation, a change in friends or habits, school problems, and depression. Major threats to teens can arise from stresses in the home (divorce, parents' substance abuse, family rules, and abusive behaviors); premature sexual activity; drug and alcohol abuse; eating disorders; and suicidal depression. Parents can help by keeping communication lines open, avoiding judgmental behavior, knowing when to seek help, and selecting a good counselor. Parents are further advised to spend time with their children before they become teenagers, develop relationships with parents who also have teenagers, monitor what's happening, and express their own values directly and clearly. Directory information for national hotlines concerning AIDS, substance abuse, dropouts, delinquency, runaways, and suicide are provided. (11 references) (MLH)

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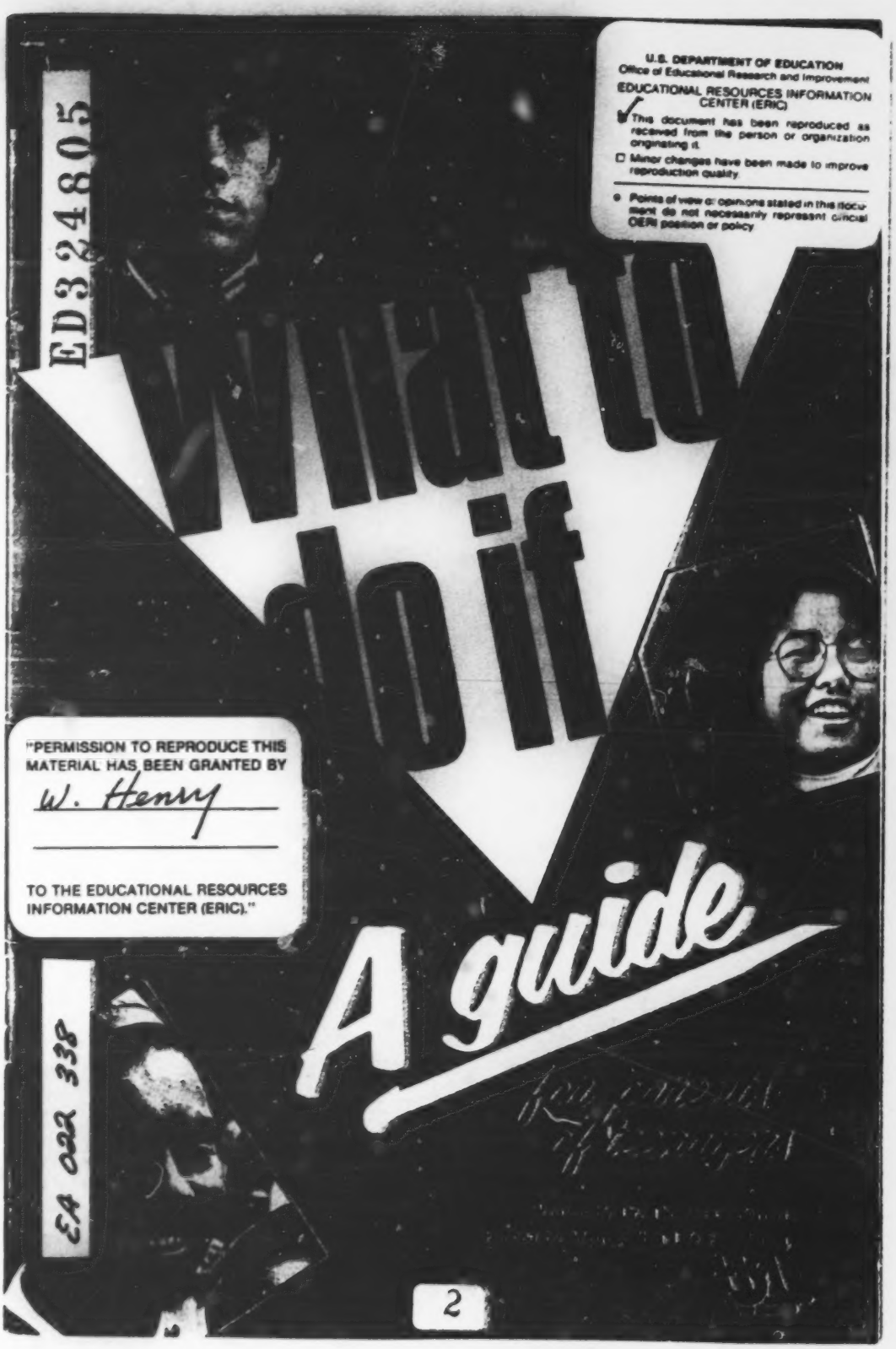

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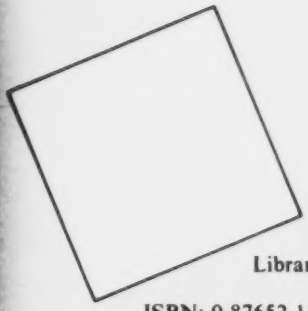

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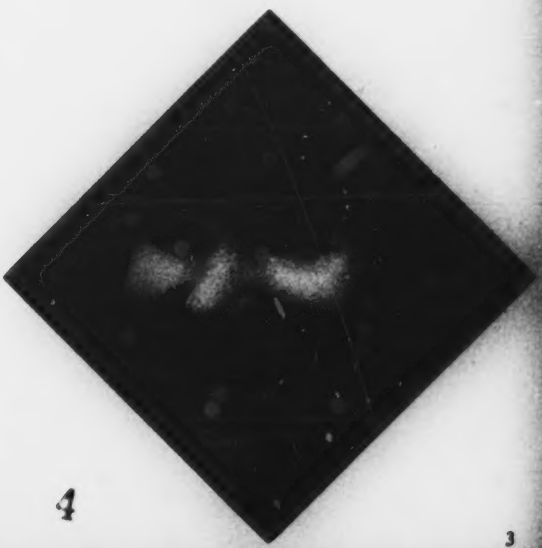
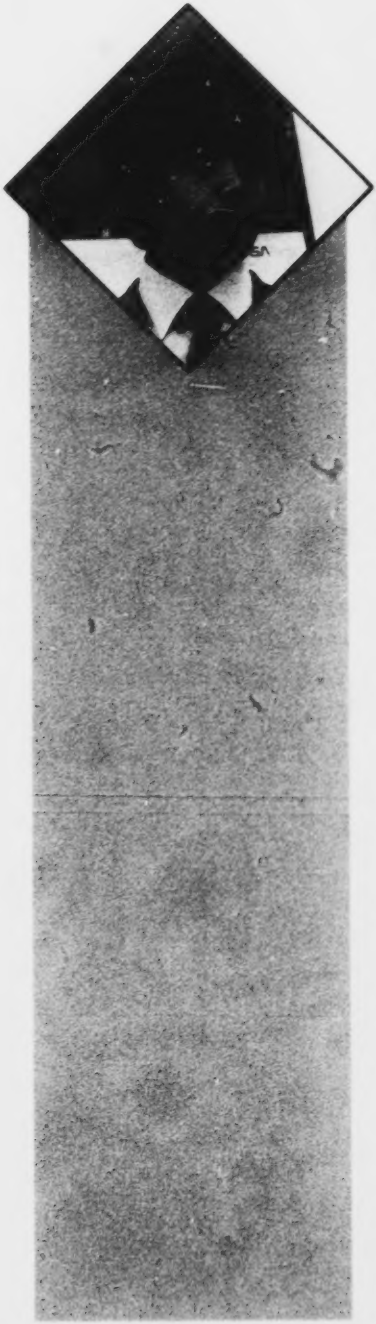
Today's Challenges

The picture painted of the life of an American teenager in today's world is sometimes frightening. Increasingly, problems such as substance abuse, pregnancy, eating disorders, depression, and even suicide are very real threats to the safety and happiness of youth.

As parents, we often worry about our children, or wonder if we are doing a good job of raising them. Parenting is the most important job most of us will ever have, yet it is a job for which we receive the least amount of training or guidance. So, some of the worries we feel about our children are natural.





Despite the attention-grabbing news we all hear about adolescents, it is important to keep in mind that most teenagers handle growing up very well and become happy, productive adults. We should be aware of how our children are feeling and acting, but there is no reason to become overly concerned without good reason. This booklet includes some warning signs each of us *will* want to keep an eye out for that could indicate serious trouble. Also included are some suggestions for both preventing crises and for dealing with them positively in case they do happen.

What Teens Face

Being a teenager may be more difficult today than it was 20 or 30 years ago. At the same time, a world of opportunity is available to teenagers that previous generations only dreamed of. While advancements in technology and communications have made the world "smaller" and more accessible to all, today's students are now responsible for a great deal more information than ever before. The "Information Age," then, is a challenge for many people.

Most of the behaviors described in this publication are characteristic of both boys and girls. To be fair — and also to be personal — we have tried to alternate between "he" and "she" when using singular pronouns throughout this publication.

Some pressures faced by today's teenagers both at home and at school are new to this era, such as AIDS and the easy availability of drugs. Others, though not new, have drawn more attention in recent years, such as child abuse and latchkey children. While chewing gum in class or running in the halls were once among the most serious discipline problems in schools, today's educators are concerned about students carrying guns, abusing alcohol and drugs or committing acts of violence against themselves and others.

Competition. Another consequence of our technical, fast-changing society is that the world has become highly competitive and stresses achievement. The importance of gaining the competitive edge is seen, for instance, in the number of young people who use anabolic steroids despite known health risks. As in many organized sports for children, the need to win has become more important than the fun of participating and learning. Unfortunately, some adolescents base their self-worth on how they compete with others.

Conformity. Teenagers also feel a need to conform along with the need to compete. Most teens feel it is important to look and act similar to their friends. This is why they are easily influenced by outside pressures from the media, in the form of television, magazines and newspapers; and businesses such as the fashion, tobacco and alcohol industries, which sell products by promoting unrealistic images.

Divorce. Changes in the family have their effect on teenagers as well. Perhaps the most significant change in the American culture over the past 20 to 30 years is the increase in the divorce rate. It has become commonplace for children to have to adjust to step-families before they have gotten used to the loss of their intact families, for example. In addition, many more teenagers than ever before spend time on their own, which may make it more difficult for them to resist pressures by their peers and others to be sexually active or to abuse alcohol and drugs.

Society's stereotype of teenagers in trouble has changed, too. For instance, the idea that drug abusing teenagers usually come from low income families is no longer true (if it ever was). No socioeconomic group is immune to any of the problems discussed in this publication.

What Parents Face

The responsibility of being a parent is not getting any easier. Millions of American parents do not fit into the traditional bread winner or homemaker role. These parents are faced with many challenges to parenting. For example, not only do some parents have to worry about their children, they may also be concerned about making ends meet while juggling a relationship, a career, and furthering their education.

The important thing to realize is that as a parent, you will, like your teenager, make mistakes sometimes. While no one is perfect, most difficulties can be overcome.

A Look at Behavior

Jim, 17, was an A student and very responsible until the first semester of his senior year of high school. Suddenly, his grades began to fall. At home, Jim told his mother over and over, "I can take care of myself." He started keeping late hours with a new set of friends, who his parents suspected were involved with drugs or alcohol. One day, he was picked up by the local police for trying to buy beer.

Karen, 15, was noticeably depressed for about two weeks. She withdrew from her friends at school and her family. She began to sleep late in the morning and sometimes refused to go to school. Finally, during an argument with her parents, she shouted that she wasn't sure if life was worth living anymore.

Is the behavior of either of these teens normal? Should their parents be worried about their health, emotional state, or even safety? How should their parents talk to them about the problems they see? And who can they or their parents contact if they feel they need outside help? This publication tries to answer these questions and more.

Emotional Vitamins for a Child's Healthy Development

Teenagers are especially prone to suffering from a lack of self-esteem. The list given below includes some sources of self-esteem and the message they convey to teens:

1. A good relationship with at least one parent. ("You are loved.")
2. Good supervision. ("You are secure.")
3. Respect as an individual. ("You are you.")
4. Encouragement and recognition of effort and achievement ("You matter.")
5. Gradually increasing responsibility and social involvement ("You are growing up.")

Apley, J. and C. Ownsted (Eds.), *One Child*, Spastics International Medical Publication, London, 1982.

What Is 'Normal' and What Is Not?

When a teenager seems troubled or is having problems, most parents are unsure if there is something seriously wrong or if it is something that will get better with time or a little extra support. Though friends or family members may say your teen is "going through a stage," this idea is somewhat old-fashioned today. Thinking certain behaviors are typical of teenagers and that your teen will outgrow them may not be the most helpful approach.

On the other hand, you may not want to panic if your child sometimes engages in unacceptable behavior. For instance, according to one study, most high school seniors (90 percent) experiment with alcohol.[1] If your teenager is among this group, this does not necessarily mean that he is or will become an alcoholic. In most cases, the emotionally healthy teenager who receives information about and support for resisting such risky behavior will probably not become seriously involved.

Some Characteristics of a Well-Adjusted Teenager

How can a parent determine what is normal behavior and what is not? The following is a checklist of characteristics considered typical of normal, well-adjusted teenagers[2]:

The ability to care and be concerned for others. The healthy teenager has friends; most often a best friend, for some period of time. She has little trouble making new friends. When she begins to have self-doubts, she is able to share these feelings with her friends and gain their support. The emotionally sound teenager also enjoys the company of a parent and other family members.

A desire to be successful. Most teenagers find satisfaction from doing well in school and other activities. This sense of satisfaction is not limited to getting good grades, but may also include earning a paycheck or fixing up a car. Like adults, teenagers feel good about completing a job that requires self-discipline and pride in what they are doing.

Parents may take their teenagers' successes for granted. However, recognition of efforts can give teens a special sense of pride and help them build self-esteem.

The ability to handle stress. A good sign of health in people of all ages is the ability to handle change and to live with stress. The healthy teenager is able to learn from his disappointments and failures. Such experiences help teenagers figure out how to survive the other problems in their lives.

Feeling out of control can be frightening for everyone, but especially for teens. However, the well-adjusted teenager will be able to look back and laugh at his own anxieties — "Boy did I freak out over that D." He will regain control and feel he can go on with his life.

mportant Note

Underlying each of the self-destructive behaviors described in this publication is an emotional disturbance — a reason for the way the child is acting. When giving support to your teen, it is important to try to understand what is causing the behavior — not just the behavior itself.

It is also important to note that teenagers often have more than one problem at a time. The tips provided in this booklet, then, are positive suggestions that can be used in a variety of situations, and are not usually specific to any one behavior.

A general feeling of good physical health. Good physical health is connected to good mental health. Most teenagers are not sick often and are not too worried about their health. A child may notice that her body is changing, but should not seem overly obsessed about it. She may even seek more information on her health and physical changes from those she trusts.

The ability to think logically. Teenagers, like adults, can think in a cause and effect way. Even though most teens view the world from their own perspective, a teenager should be able to allow others their opinions, learn from his experiences and know the consequences of his behavior ahead of time. When he is upset, he does not lose all of his ability to think clearly.

The ability to have fun. Fun is good for people of all ages. The healthy teenager is able to enjoy life, laugh at himself, and see the humor in many everyday events. He can "joke around" with his friends and family.

Kids Who May Be Headed for Trouble

The following are some behaviors to watch out for that signal the need for help.

Dramatic mood swings. Your teenager will experience mood swings just as most people do. There will be days when he might say, "Life's a drag." Normally, these moods are not extreme and do not last very long. However, if

your teenager seems hostile and the anger lasts for several days, this is a warning sign that something may be wrong.

Isolation. You probably have noticed that your teenager likes some privacy. She may sometimes retreat to her room where she can be alone to think about the events in her life. This is common among teenagers. If, however, your teenager avoids being with you most of the time, has stopped seeing her friends, and has stopped doing things she once liked to do, these may be signs that something more serious is going on.

A change in friends. There may be times when your teenager will make new friends. Often he will choose friends who share his values. On the other hand, if a teenager suddenly begins to spend time with kids who have a reputation for being drug users or gang members, this clearly is a warning sign.

A change in habits. Teenagers, like each of us, may experience changes in eating or sleeping habits for a short time. If a pattern lasts for several days, however, you will want to watch more closely and begin to question why this is happening.

School problems. Sometimes even teenagers who are interested in school will slip and get a bad grade. However, if a teen shows a drop in performance across the board, this is something to learn more about. Or, if authority figures, such as teachers, say a teen is behaving badly, this is another clue the child is having trouble.

Depressed mood. Again, like each of us, a teen may experience the "blahs." No one thinks life is wonderful all of the time. When things don't go right, such as the breakup of a romance, most teens will be upset. Even during these times, most teenagers find some bright spot in life — such as their friends.

It may be difficult to know when to start worrying about a child's depression. Not all teenagers respond to stress the same way. To be on the safe side, you might want to become more actively involved if your child's low mood lasts longer than four or five days.

On how parents can be better listeners:
"Sit down. Don't do something else while you're trying to listen...It's kind of distracting."

On why his mother is a good parent:
"She gives me a lot of independence. She trusts me."

Words of Wisdom from Ryan, Age 13

WHY Do Teens Act the Way They Do?

The Best of Times, the Worst of Times

According to one expert, the following are considered factors that can create a crisis for teenagers.[3] Though not all of these situations are unpleasant, they may still cause stress:

- Breakup of a romance.
- Change in schools.
- Menstruation.
- Sexual intercourse.
- Unwanted pregnancy.
- Involvement with the police or courts.
- Success or failure in school or athletics.
- Difficulty on the job.
- Graduation from high school.
- Going to college.
- Conflicts with parents over personal habits and life-style.

Of course, most people face many or all of these situations to some degree during their teenage years without becoming self-destructive. This list may give you an idea, however, of when to pay special attention and when to offer extra care and comfort.

Stresses in the Home

Certain situations in the home may also complicate the difficulties teenagers are facing, or may introduce new crises. Some of these problems (though not all) are:

- Alcohol or drug abuse by parents.
- Physical, emotional or sexual abuse.
- Loss of a family member through death.
- Divorce of parents.
- High level of stress in the home.
- Rules of the family that are too strict or not strict enough.
- A history of depression in the family.

When a teenager experiences more than one of these situations at the same time of course, his stress level goes up.

FOUR

Major Threats to Teens

As they struggle to cross the bridge to adulthood, most teenagers will show some changes in behavior. The following behaviors are considered especially risky to the health and well-being of teens.

Premature Sexuality

Because teens are experiencing the hormonal changes of puberty along with pressure from their peers, they may have a new or increased interest in the opposite sex. While these feelings are to be expected, teens acting on their sexuality or need for love are running the risk of becoming parents too soon or contracting sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Consider these statistics:

- By age 13, 20 percent of U.S. teenagers have already had their first sexual experience; the average age at which teens become sexually active is 16.[4]
- Before leaving high school, one in four girls will experience a pregnancy.[5]
- It is estimated that 2.5 million teens are infected with sexually transmitted diseases each year.[6]
- As of spring 1989, more than 18,000 people between the ages of 20 and 29 had been diagnosed with AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome). Because a person can be infected with the virus that causes AIDS for as long as 10 or more years before symptoms appear, a large number were infected when they were teenagers.[7]

Not all of the one million teen pregnancies each year are accidents. Many teenage girls use pregnancy as a means to achieve independence from parents, achieve a sense of power, or feel like an adult. At the same time, many teens have very low self-esteem and are looking for someone to love and someone to love them. (There is an old saying that boys use love to get sex and girls use sex to get love.)

According to one expert,[8] both boys and girls may become sexually active because of the following reasons:

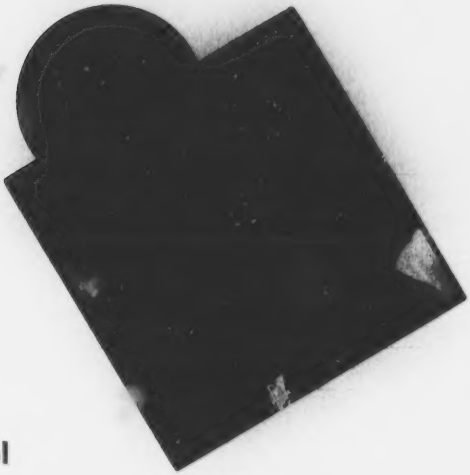
- **A belief in fate, "whatever will be will be."** Those teenagers who believe that their lives are controlled by forces outside of themselves may be less likely to use contraception.
- **Social rejection.** These teens may be feeling rejection by family or peers, and literally are looking to be loved. Young girls, particularly, may be more vulnerable to displays of affection leading to sexual intercourse.
- **A tendency for "acting out."** Teenagers who are angry and act out their anger may be at greater risk for sexual behavior leading to pregnancy. These teenagers may be reckless in other ways and live on the edge of disaster.

All of these motives for becoming sexually active indicate that a teenager is immature in his thinking and does not have the ability to foresee the consequences of his behavior. As children mature, parents begin to wonder and worry about teenagers' beliefs regarding sex. Many parents fear they don't have any real control over their teenagers' sexual behavior. One way we, as parents, can help teenagers deal with the sometimes confusing changes in their bodies and emotions is to help them build their self-esteem. Emotionally secure adolescents are less likely to suffer the consequences of unsafe sex. They are able to resist pressure to have sex and still feel good about themselves.

The greatest help a parent can give a teenager to guard against the problem of sexual activity is the same as that recommended for each of the challenges described in this book: a loving family atmosphere where the open expression of thought is encouraged and accepted.

ou can't fill my head with
knowledge until I have a healthy **mind.**"

Words of **teenage girl**



Drugs and Alcohol

According to a 1989 study by the National Institute on Drug Abuse, drug use is dropping among U.S. teens.[9] Of the 17,142 high school seniors surveyed:

- 19.7 percent said they used an illicit drug at least once the previous month, down from 21.3 percent in 1988. Of these drugs, teenagers most often mentioned marijuana (16.7 percent) and cocaine (2.8 percent).
- 71.8 percent, as opposed to 69.2 percent in 1989, said they considered occasional cocaine use very risky.
- 77.2 percent, versus 74 percent in 1988, disapproved of even occasional use of marijuana.
- The percentage of seniors responding that they had consumed alcohol during the 30 days prior to the survey fell from 72 percent in 1980 to 60 percent in 1989. The percentage reporting heavy drinking (having five or more drinks at one time during the prior two weeks) also decreased, from 41 percent in 1983 to 33 percent in 1989.

Though these statistics are encouraging, substance abuse continues to be a major threat to the well-being of teenagers.

Contrary to what many think, it may not be peer pressure that determines if a teen will abuse drugs or alcohol — but rather how he views himself and the world around him, and his ability to find solutions to his problems. For example, as one 17-year-old girl who became a drug addict at the age of 13 said, "The difference between me and kids who experiment with drugs is that they do it to get high and feel good at times, and I do it all the time to keep from feeling bad." This girl had difficulty coping with life, so she postponed the pain and fear she felt by living in a world of unreality.

It may be difficult to determine if a child is using or experimenting with drugs or alcohol, since most young people try to hide this behavior from their parents. If you are concerned about substance abuse, you may want to contact a local mental health center or one of the sources listed in this publication.

As parents, we can also help our teenagers avoid drug and alcohol use in these important ways[10]:

Act as a role model. Children learn more from what parents do than what parents tell them.

Keep well-informed. While it isn't necessary to become an expert on drugs, each of us should know some facts — such as the chemicals young people use most frequently and what behaviors they cause. Public libraries, local mental health organizations, and health or drug rehabilitation clinics may be good sources of information. A very informative publication that lists many specific drugs and their effects, signs of drug use and ways parents can help their children, is available from the U.S. Department of Education. This booklet, *Schools Without Drugs*, can be ordered by sending your name and address to: Schools Without Drugs, Pueblo, Colo. 81009.

Eating Disorders

Our society has helped create the image that being thin is the ideal. A wide variety of diet aids and diet and exercise programs have become multi-million dollar businesses by promoting this attitude. As a result, teenagers, particularly females, put their health in jeopardy to be thin.

It has been estimated that between 5 to 10 percent of adolescent girls and young women have eating disorders. While some teenage boys have this problem, 95 percent of those known to have this disorder are female.[11] Eating disorders can become life-threatening because of the physical damage that is done to the body, including irreversible kidney failure and damage to the heart leading to cardiac arrest and sudden death.

The two eating disorders of most concern to health care providers are anorexia nervosa and bulimia. A teenager with anorexia will literally starve herself. A bulimic teenager alternates between eating too little and eating too much. Teenagers with bulimia try to rid themselves of food they've eaten by "purging," which may mean vomiting or taking laxatives.

These problems are signs of disturbances in young people that go beyond a teenager's normal concern about being trim and fit. A teenager with an eating disorder struggles with feelings that she has no control over her own life. She is often the "perfect" child, student and friend, and is often found in upper-middle class families.

If a teenager has such a disorder, she may be experiencing depression, which also makes her vulnerable to substance abuse and suicide attempts. The following occurrences may alert you to a potential problem.

- Unexplained weight loss or weight fluctuations.
- Distorted body image (she says, "I am fat," despite being very thin).
- Extensive dieting or hoarding of food.

- Use of diet pills, laxatives or diuretics.
- Obsession with exercise.
- Frequent vomiting or loss of tooth enamel.
- Dizziness or fainting spells.
- Menstrual irregularities.

Unfortunately, eating disorders are sometimes difficult to detect because a teenager may go to great lengths to hide her self-destructive behavior.

Whenever an eating disorder is suspected, you should explore, observe and, perhaps, record your teen's behavior. Early detection and intervention improves the chances that a teenager can recover before serious physical damage is done. Consulting with pediatricians or mental health professionals who specialize in eating disorders makes good sense too. They can help parents determine if a problem exists and help make a decision about the best course of action.

Suicidal Depression

Suicide by young people is a growing concern. No one knows for sure why so many kids are choosing to end it all, though some teens consider suicide a way of escaping problems and the very bad feelings that go with them.

Like many physical illnesses, there are warning signs:

- Withdrawal from family and friends.
- Frequent anger.
- Poor or increased appetite.
- Weight loss or gain.
- Trouble sleeping or sleeping a lot.
- Constant fatigue.
- Feelings of worthlessness.
- An inability to concentrate.
- Feelings of futility.
- Mention of suicide or death.

The last item, mention of suicide or death, may be the most direct sign. A child may say she is thinking about suicide fairly directly, for example: "I wish I were dead." Or, she may say something softer, such as, "I don't see any way out of this," or "You'll be sorry once I'm gone." Even if parents think their child may be saying these things just to scare them, it is important to treat these situations seriously.

Important: If you suspect your teenager may be thinking about suicide, do not be afraid to talk to her about your fears. Most suicidal teenagers are looking for someone to care enough about them to ask questions and then to listen. If your teen indicates that she sees you as the cause of her problems, however, you should get some outside help immediately.

Immediate Action Is Vital

If you determine that you might, indeed, have a suicidal child, you *must* take action:

- Get assistance. You are essential in helping your child get through this period, but don't try to do it alone. It is difficult for a person close to the situation to see it clearly, and it is too stressful to handle it by yourself.
- It is crucial to continue to talk with the child. Listen to what they are saying, both in words and in their body language.
- Assure them their feelings are important, not shameful or crazy. Don't tell them to "cheer up" or that "everything will be all right" or that "these are the best years of your life."
- Let your child know by your words and your actions that they are important and their problems are important. Ask things such as, "How would you like for things to be different?" Or, "You've listened to that song a lot today. How do you feel when you hear it?" Or, "You seem really sad. Will you tell me about it?"

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ust because someone can't say what's bothering them doesn't mean nothing is. Don't rely too heavily on verbal cues."

Nancy Berk, Nothern Virginia Hotline

PARENTS

Once again, it is important to keep in mind that no simple solutions exist to these and other problems faced by teenagers. As noted earlier, often the greatest help a parent can give a teen is a loving, open family atmosphere.

Communication is a very important part of helping a troubled teenager. The following are ways to provide verbal support without alienating, so that both you and your child can work together to solve problems.

1. Set a time with your teenager when you can begin to talk without being interrupted.
2. Try to avoid being judgmental. Use "I" rather than "you" statements. For example, "I feel that there is a message you are trying to give me. I want to try and understand you so that we can make things better."
3. Don't blame his friends for what is going on. You probably have noticed that when you do this your teen gets very angry and defends them. He will appreciate being held responsible for his own behavior.
4. Notice his emotions and show him that you are aware and concerned about how he has been feeling.
5. Ask him to talk about what decisions he wants to make about his life that he feels he is not getting to make. Are these realistic for a teenager? Do you need to rethink this together and make changes if needed? You may find that you need to start letting go a little.
6. You might ask your child if he thinks you are available to him as much as he would like. Sometimes, risky behavior in a teenager is an attempt to reunite a family if the bonds seem to be weakening. Part of what he may be going through is the need to feel like he can lean on you for support, and at the same time, stand on his own two feet. Sometimes these feelings are in conflict and can cause a teenager a lot of frustration.

H. Carol Twilley, an assistant principal in Catonsville, Md., suggests that parents become actively involved with their teenagers' teachers, guidance counselors, and principals on a regular basis. "We're a team. We're not adversaries. The more we communicate, the more we can help a child. Not knowing, or assuming, is very hurtful to anyone's progress," she said.

If these steps don't help, you might want to start family counseling.

Fatherly Advice

Donald Draayer, superintendent of the Minnetonka Public Schools in Excelsior, Minn., and father of two, gives the following advice to parents based on his own experiences:

1. **Spend time with your children before they are teenagers**. For example, take children on a camping weekend at the onset of their teenage years. During this weekend, outline the changes they can expect in their bodies, moods, and relationships with the opposite sex and others. Emphasize these occurrences are normal and to be expected. After the trip, write up a short report of what was discussed and present it to each child. As your children go through the teenage years, remind them from time to time of the camping trip and what they learned.
2. **Develop relationships with parents who have teenagers the same age and older than your children**. This not only provides a support group and lets parents know what to expect as their children get older, it fosters trust between parents and children because parents can communicate where each others' teens are spending time and what they are doing.
3. **Monitor and "stay on top" of what is happening**. Keep track of teenagers and what they are interested in without reining them in too much.
4. **Be clear of your own values**. State values directly, by saying "This is what I believe..."

Knowing When To Get Help

The information you already have read in this booklet should give you an idea of when your youngster is behaving in a normal way or if she is showing signs that more serious things are going on. This information, along with your gut-level feelings as her parent, is the best way to tell if you should seek some advice from a source outside your family. Some indicators that your teenager may need this kind of help are when you suspect or observe:

- Anger that is out of control.
- Loneliness, isolation, and depression.
- Regular use of drugs or alcohol.
- Unusual problems at school.
- Trouble in the community that involves the police.
- That you and your teen aren't communicating effectively.
- Your child may be considering suicide.

It is important to remember that no one is to blame if things start to go wrong for your child and your family. If your teenager has a problem, it is a family affair. And, if you approach it as a family issue — rather than your teenager's problem — you will meet with less resistance from him when you

work together to find a solution. The fact is that every crisis in the life of an individual is a chance for growth — for the entire family.

Another important thing to keep in mind is that though many of the problems teenagers face can be serious, all are treatable. The earlier they are identified, the greater the chances for recovery.

Selecting a Good Counselor

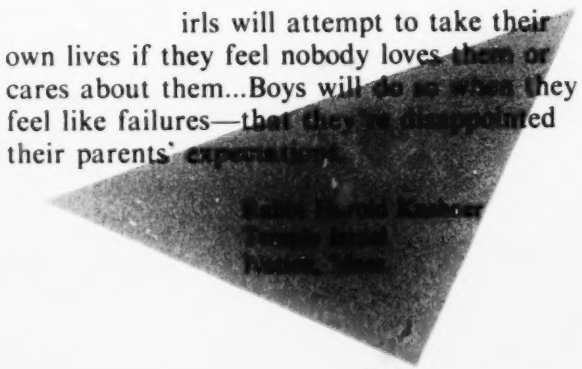
There are many types of counseling and counselors. They have many different levels of training and they charge different amounts of money for their services. The important thing is to find a counselor who is right for you, your child and your situation, not necessarily one who charges high fees or has many degrees.

You may want to interview several counselors over the phone to find one you feel at ease with. Here are some questions you may want to ask:

1. How much experience do you have in working with the problems my teenager is having? (Give the counselor a brief description.)
2. How long do you think the counseling will take?
3. How much will it cost? Do you take insurance and, if not, are you willing to negotiate a cost I can afford?
4. How will you involve our family in counseling?

If you are worried that your teen is considering suicide, you should ask if the counselor will take charge of the situation and be available between appointments. You and your teen will need someone who is very accessible.

After these interviews, ask yourself who made you feel most comfortable. Counseling will not work if you and the counselor do not feel connected.


irls will attempt to take their
own lives if they feel nobody loves them or
cares about them...Boys will do so when they
feel like failures—that they've disappointed
their parents' expectations.

Finding the Right Professional

Finding the right counselor to work with you and your teenager is as important as finding the right physician. You can:

- Ask for names from guidance counselors at your child's school.
- Ask someone you know, especially a friend, for a recommendation.
- Call your state's mental health association and ask for sources.
- Send for a copy of "A Guide To Finding and Using Professional Help: Reaching Out for Mental Health." You can get this by calling the Mental Health Association of Colorado, Inc., at (303) 595-3500 in Denver, Colo. You may want to get a copy even if you aren't in need of professional help at this time, to have on hand just in case.

CONCLUSION

Being a parent in the 1990s may be a greater challenge than ever before. While the world is bright with promise for teenagers today, these children also face numerous and complex tests of their values, beliefs, and will power. By providing an open family environment where lines of communication are broad and free, observing moods and behavior, and knowing when to pay special attention or seek outside guidance, we can help our teenagers successfully cross the bridge to maturity.

Helping children grow and become ready to live on their own can be a deeply rewarding experience. As parents, we are given the chance to help ensure our children not only meet the demands of adulthood, but also experience life as happy and productive citizens. By working together, parents and children can share a lifetime of enjoyment and satisfaction.

Hot Lines

AIDS

National AIDS Hot Line
U.S. Public Health Service
Available 7 days a week, 24 hours a day.
English ..... (800) 342-AIDS
Spanish ..... (800) 344-SIDA
Deaf Access ..... (800) 243-STTY

Teens Teaching AIDS Prevention
The Good Samaritan Project
Available Monday through Friday,
4:00 to 8:00 p.m., CST ..... (800) 234-TEEN

Alcohol and Drug Abuse

The National Federation of Parents for Drug Free Youth
National resource and information center.
Available Monday through Friday,
9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., EST ..... (800) 554-KIDS

Cocaine Helpline
Information and referral service.
Available 7 days a week, 24 hours a day . (800) COCAINE

Dropouts,Truancy, Juvenile Delinquency

Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse
U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP)
Information and referral service.
Available 8:30 a.m. to 7:00 p.m., EST ..... (800) 638-8736

Runaways

National Runaway Hot Line
Referral service for teens and parents.
Available 7 days a week, 24 hours a day ..... (800) 231-6946

Suicide Prevention

Crisis Line
Suicide Prevention Center
Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week ..... (513) 223-4777

In addition, many areas operate a 24-hour local hot line where listeners will help callers with myriad concerns. Also, local resources, from doctors to clinics and counselors, can be located in the phone book under "Mental Health Services."

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